Civil Air Patrol
Oral History Interview

WNHC5.82-1

Mr. William J. Fandison

1 March 1982

NATIONAL HISTORICAL COMMITTEE
Headquarters CAP

CIVIL AIR PATROL

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Interview

of

Mr. William J. Fandison

by

Lt Colonel Lester E. Hopper, CAP

DATE: 1 March 1982

LOCATION: New Orleans, Louisiana

CIVIL AIR PATROL ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

Civil Air Patrol Oral History interviews were initiated in early 1982 by Lt. Colonel Lester E. Hopper, CAP, of the Civil Air Patrol's National Historical Committee. The overall purpose of these interviews is to record for posterity the activities of selected members of the Civil Air Patrol.

The principle goal of these histories is to increase the base of knowledge relating to the early accomplishments of Civil Air Patrol members who in their own unique way contributed to the defense of our great country. Certainly not of a secondary nature is the preservation of the contributions of individuals as Civil Air Patrol continues its growth.

FOREWORD

The following is the transcript of an oral history interview recorded on magnetic tape. Since only minor emendations have been made, the reader should consistently bear in mind that he is reading a transcript of the spoken rather than the written word. Additionally, no attempt to confirm the historical accuracy of the statements has been made. As a result, the transcript reflects the interviewee's personal recollections of a situation as he remembered it at the time of the interview.

Editorial notes and additions made by CAP historians are enclosed in brackets. If feasible, first names, ranks, or titles are also provided. Any additions, deletions and changes subsequently made to the transcript by the interviewee are not indicated. Researchers may wish to listen to the actual interview tape prior to citing the transcript.

PREFACE

For every undertaking there must be a beginning. This writing represents the beginning of Civil Air Patrol's Oral History Program. As is the case with many new projects, mistakes were made. In the case at hand was the loss of a portion of the first tape of the interview. As a result, the reader is left with the impression that he is starting in the middle of an interview. To partially eliminate this void the interviewer offers the statement that the "lost" portion of the interview pertained primarily to the establishment of Mr. Fandison's background and his post-war experiences in his normal career field. We then enter the interview at the point where the command structure of Civil Air Patrol Coastal Patrol Base 9 is being discussed. It should be noted that at times Mr. Fandison illustrated his interview with photographs which are not available for publication.

L. E. Hopper
COL CAP
February, 1984

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In this oral history interview, Mr. William J. Fandison relates his involvement on active duty as a mechanic at Civil Air Patrol Coastal Patrol Base 9 on Grand Isle, Louisiana. Mr. Fandison served in several capacities with Base 9 from its inception at New Orleans Lakefront Airport in early 1942 until its closure at Grand Isle in August of 1943.

Mr. Fandison provides excellent insight into the primative living and working conditions at Grand Isle. He relates his firsthand experiences on the repair and modification of civilian aircraft for their use in a combat role. His secondary observations on such things as base command structure, operations, medical services, etc. are certainly worthy of note.

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H. Byron Armstrong, who was he?

F. Byron was a major. The first major that went down. He moved on the base.

H. He was actually the base commander, then.

F. I don't know why he left, but he came back to New Orleans and Major Hayes came down and when Hayes left Smith came.

H. Was that William Hayes?

F. Yes.

H. Who was your Engineering Officer down there, Bill?

F. Mike Heim was the Engineering Officer.

H. And, as you say, you're not positive if any of these guys are around New Orleans anymore. Have you been in contact with them?

F. Henry Muntz was our first engineering officer. He was a local boy. He worked for, I think it was Public Service, I think he worked on diesel engines. He came down there. Then there was an engineer officer in the mechanics department, name was Louis Trosclair from Houma, he was a mechanic for Texaco for years and years. I think Louis is dead now too.

H. From what research I have done, they paid you all a per diem and that's all.

F. That's right.

H. And let's see, ground people got paid $4.00 or $5.00 a day or something like that.

F. It ran about $150.00 a month. I don't know what pilots got. They didn't get too much.

H. No, they either got $7.00 or $8.00 a day.

F. Mine was always split up, I didn't know what I got.

H. You got what you got.

F. Ya, and the hard part about it was you got paid this month and it might be two or three months before you got another payday. And you had to get the people down there to carry

you that long. What was nice about it, they fed us and said when you get your check you come pay us. That was just their attitude.

H. That's not much money, because you had to provide your room and board.

F. When all this came up, we were just coming out of a depression working for $4.00 or $5.00 a week. If you got $35.00 or $40.00 a week that was big money. Nobody griped about the money. The only thing we griped about was that it was so slow coming. We couldn't keep our current bills up. We were always in debt, we didn't know where we were going. But fortunately, the people down there were great. When you left the island and came up to New Orleans, no matter where you stopped off, if you went in to have a cup of coffee or a hamburger or something those people wouldn't let you pay for nothing. I saw days when I went in, or a couple of us would go in, and order a hamburger and a soft drink and a guy would come out with a steak and french fried potatoes and we'd say we didn't order that. And they'd say that man over there said to give it to you. That's the way they were.

H. They had a lot of patriotism.

F. Go to the show, you couldn't pay to go to the show.

H. The uniform you wore was regular Army, with red epaulets?

What was the problem with the regular CAP wings? I've seen a lot of pictures where the guy took the CAP emblem and a regular set of Air Force Wings and glued the CAP emblem on the Air Force Wings.

F. Oh, they just wanted to be theatrical, that's all.

H. CAP wings looked a lot like the German insignia and I just thought there might be some background on it because of that.

F. No, they just wanted to be regular Air Force. A lot of the guys didn't want to wear the red straps and they didn't want to wear what they call the Smiling Jack Eagle. A lot of them used to take them off when they went to town. When they went back to the base they put them on.

H. They were slip on?

F. Ya, I didn't hear any of our boys gripe. Les, there was a Mrs. Blocker, I don't know where she is, but her husband lived right in the back of me. He had a flying school out there at the Lakefront. He was in CAP and really very active in it. He was on the island with us. I know he took a hellava lot of pictures cause he was a photographer, he did aerial photography and all that, but where Mrs. Blocker is now I don't know.

H. He passed away or something?

F. Ya, he died several years ago, but I'm sure she has some pictures and stuff from when he was flying and all.

H. One of the things I'm trying to accomplish, Bill, is to develop a little of the history of CAP being involved in the war. You know, most people don't appreciate the tremendous job that was done by you all. I had my two wars which I participated in, but that was an entirely different situation. The way you all had to do it was tough. Everything they could give us we had.

F. We didn't have nothing.

H. And that's the point.

F. Do you know what we had for baffles in between the cylinders to keep the engines cool?

H. Coca-Cola signs.

F. That's right. We went down the highway, took the Coca-Cola signs trimmed them up with washers and put them in there and they did the job.

H. And all the barrels for muffler stacks.

F. No, we didn't use them for mufflers.

H. What did you use them for?

F. We used them to build our own heaters on the mufflers and then run it into the cockpit. And they had some people from New Orleans Air Force come down here and they said what's that, I said that's a heater. They said, "a heater", I said that's right. So they said how do you take it off to inspect it? Well, if the air smells bad when it comes in, that's it.

H. Wasn't that rather dangerous?

F. They had to have something.

H. It gets cool after four or five hours out there over that Gulf. Just how did you all operate?

F. I don't know how other guys worked, but when there was a transport coming on down the river, we would get a coded message that night and the next morning on towards daybreak they told us to fly over there and meet that ship or two ships or three ships, and they would be coming out to Gulf and we'd take them as far as maybe Sabine River and another squadron would pick them up and

H. That would probably be the Beaumont bunch.

F. Most probably Beaumont, and then our boys would come back

H. You were actually assigned escort duty, not just searching.

F. While you were scouting for submarines you never saw them, because they laid out the mouth of the River, in the murky water. If they got out in the clear water you could see them. Eight hundred or a thousand feet you'd see the whole submarine. But you know in that murky water you wouldn't spot them unless they'd come up. If they'd come up the only alternative we'd have was to get as far away from them as we could and call in to a squadron at New Orleans Air Force.

H. Let them come down.

F. Let them come out and take care of everything.

H. One hundred pounds wouldn't do you much good?

F. You know 90 miles an hour with them guns they have on them things are tough.

H. Did you all have sightings down there that you know of?

F. Some of the boys said they sighted some. Its possible that they did. I don't know. Could have been a log floating down there. Nothing came of it, you know. Couldn't locate them.

H. You all did a tremendous job back then. In that particular period, your major job was you flew when you could but you mostly worked on airplanes.

F. Ya, I had my license and all that but like I tell you, you had to have a buddy.

H. If you had a friend you could fly it and if not, you didn't.

F. Luckily, we had some like Johnny Peyton from Shreveport. Johnny ran the Silver Slipper Night Club up there, and had a big dress shop in Shreveport. Johnny would say you want to fly the airplane go ahead, but let me see your license. Here I got my license, Johnny. Want to fly it to New Orleans, go ahead and take it.

H. Where were most of the people on the base from, Louisiana or someplace else?

F. Arkansas, we had a bunch from Arkansas. Some from New York, some from Texas, some from Louisiana. Well, we had a 100 and some odd men down there. Out of the 100 men, 25 or 30 of them were from New Orleans. I know they were from all over.

H. I have one reference here. See if it makes sense to you. It says they had 31 land planes and 5 seaplanes.

F. At Grand Isle?

H. Yes.

F. We had two seaplanes.

H. Two seaplanes?

F. No, one. That was the only seaplane we had. It was a Fleetwing Seabird manufactured by Nate Faylor.

H. It was a rare kind, wasn't it? How many were manufactured?

F. Four of them, we had two. Two of them crashed up north and we had two of them here, and out of the two of them down here we had one at Grand Isle.

H. But you did have two seaplanes here then?

F. One seaplane, the other one was out at Michoud. This is the one that belonged to Florsheim. Those things scare the hell out of you, Les. Oh ya, you pull the throttle back to come in for a landing, the nose was way out there when you come in like that you just might put your nose in the water.

H. Did you have as many land planes as this account said, thirty-one of them?

F. No, we didn't have that many.

H. That was a newspaper article at the time. Let's see, what about Melvin Smith, who was he?

F. He was one of the majors down here, I got his picture in here. Let's see, the one with the airplanes on it. Here's that Major Melvin Smith right here. I don't remember how many planes we had there, but I don't think we had thirty-one there.

H. Did you have any interesting periods down there other than just the hard living?

F. What do you mean interesting?

H. Well, you know, did you crash or anything like that? That's always of interest.

F. Well, we were lucky, we didn't have any crashes. Sometime on your patrol you'd see a lifeboat on the shore, and we'd go down and look at it and come back to the base and notify the Coast Guard and they'd go down and recover the bodies. One night offshore that had sunk the men couldn't get off and burned right there in the boat. The Coast Guard used to hate that.

H. Ya, that's not a very nice job.

F. And interestingly, we used to fly down to the beach and all these different islands and get these little bales off the sunken boats and we'd bring them back to the hangar and hang them there. I guess we had a hundred and fifty, two hundred bales of raw rubber in there. Many times we tried to give it back to the government or the Coast Guard. They said, we don't want it, it's yours, it's salvage. So finally, we took it back to the base and we sold it and the money we got, we gave a party every night up at the casino.

H. Some of the pictures from that period were interesting. They were well set up at some locations. I sort of envisioned the Coastal Patrol operation sort of how you had it down at Grand Isle, sort of rough and tumble and get by the best you could. But some were set up like a regular military installation.

F. Ya, some were a regular town, they had everything they wanted. The hangar we had, it wasn't too big. It had a little lean to on the side. It was stocked with welding equipment and workbenches and stuff like that.

H. How did you get your equipment? Did you get it from the Army, or did you go out and buy it yourself?

F. Far as I know, all the equipment was owned by the individual who used it.

F. It was all individual owned airplanes they took down there. They got paid so much a month for them.

H. Oh, they paid them for the use of the airplane too.

F. That's right.

H. I didn't realize that.

F. They had to do something, they didn't have any airplanes.

H. It was an amazing period in our country's history that people flocked to the job like that.

H. Well, you always have some like that.

F. They would say, hell, I'm not going down there. So you had two CAP's at that time. You had one at Grand Isle and you had one at New Orleans Air Force. We used to call them the weekend CAP. They didn't like that. You know, another thing was safety, that's the one thing I forgot. We had a lawyer from New York who came down there. He came into New Orleans to do something, and going back by plane to the island, near Jesuits Point he started doing aerobatics over the worse part of the swamp. He crashed coming out of a loop and stayed in that swamp all night long. He wasn't hurt, the wing of his airplane broke the water line. He said the muskrat and mosquitos and snakes

kept coming up on the wings. I think he was about to have a nervous breakdown. We brought him back to the base and they took him into the hospital right away.

H. Where did you all go for medical help down there? Did you all have some doctors down there with you or what?

F. Dr. Robertson used to come down there once a week on a Saturday or a Sunday and give us shots and all. Outside of that, if anybody was really sick they flew them in to New Orleans.

H. The Pascagoula base had a full time doctor. In fact, he was one of the ones who was killed over there. They dropped an airplane in with two people on it out in the Gulf.

F. No, we didn't have a full time doctor. He'd come down on weekends and give us a check or give us a shot and that was it.

H. It sure was an interesting period.

F. Well, I tell you, we enjoyed it. We had a good time doing it. Nobody griped or complained. Anything you wanted done, you just mentioned it and there it was. Even the natives down there, man, they went all out for you.

H. What are you doing now? Just kind of relaxing.

F. Just hanging around the house here. I got a camp out on the lakefront. I'm getting ready to go out there, clean it up and do a little painting and spend the summer out there.

H. At Little Woods?

F. Got my boat all covered up. Do a little shrimping and crabbing.

H. Let me ask you, did you get any special markings on your aircraft down there?

F. I know what you mean, but we didn't have any. There were no insignias or anything added to them. One of these boys from New York brought down a beautiful staggerwing Beechcraft. It was red. You could see yourself in it, but he was a pain in the ass. "Wipe your feet off before you get in it".

H. On a shell strip, huh? (Laughter)

F. Wash it down. Wash it down with what? All we got is salt water down here, you want that on it? We got cistern water, sometime in the summer we didn't have enough to drink.

H. That must have been a mess.

F. Get one of those dry spells and the cistern wouldn't have any water left.

H. And then, when it did, it had wigglers in it.

F. Oh ya. You talk about wigglers, one of these boys from New York was down there and saw we had a silk stocking tied around the faucet to catch the wigglers when they came out. He said I don't mind drinking the water, but I don't want it to strain the juice off the wigglers. (laughter)

H. Ya, I guess those old Yankee boys didn't know too much about wigglers, did they?

F. No. Here this is half of the bomb rack we had. I think I had to get rid of the other four when we flooded back out here. They got all wet and damaged. And this here we used to carry 100 pound demolition bombs and put them on a 90 horsepower Stinson.

H. How did you release the bomb?

F. From the cockpit with a rope. They had a lever under the top there. And the other portion, I don't know what happened to it. I must have thrown it away. But these

things here weren't more than about 10 inches off the ground.

H. That's what I understand from reading.

F. Let's see if I can find some pictures here. I threw away a lot of things. Here's some of them here. Here's the crew here, out taking their morning drill. Here's another one here, this is right by the shell road there. Washboard Road. There's an old Stinson Reliant, I was standing by it.

H. Who was Big Tony?

F. He was from upstate New York. He was a mechanic. This boy was from Arkansas. He was a radio technician. Let's see if we got anymore of them here, Les. Here's the big shots, majors, this guy here was a lunatic, they soon transferred him out of the place. See, there's that Fleetwing. One of the high rollers owned it.

H. What was his name?

F. Roland Florsheim.

H. Where was he from?

F. Shreveport.

H. The Oldeander Hotel, I've been there.

F. We took over that hotel when we went down there. That was the bomb we carried underneath there, the 100 lb. demolition bomb. Here we are trying our skill at the beach.

H. Hayes, Isaac. Isaac Hayes, right?

F. I don't remember who that was. I don't remember what his first name was.

H. I've done a little research, Bill. I have been able to get about three paragraphs in a book written by a guy named Neprud right after the war about the Grand Isle Base, and that's it.

F. We had a book, a boy from Arkansas wrote it. I had one of them but, like I say, most of my stuff went with the flood, and it all went rotten.

H. In '65 was it?

F. Ya, Betsy. It was a hellava good book. I looked for it this afternoon. You could have gotten anything you wanted out of it.

H. Are there anymore of your partners still left around that were down there?

F. Les, I don't know. When I left base there, when they shut down the base, we were only there until the Army got sufficient airplanes to do their own patrol.

H. September of '43, I think.

F. When they opened up the Naval Base in Houma with the blimps, that's when they closed down our base at the island.

H. What did you do then? Did you quit flying for CAP?

F. Well, down on the island I was doing both, a mechanic and a flight crew member. When they closed that down, I went on out to Lafayette, Louisiana and went to the Army Air Base as an instructor, training and stuff like that. I was a ground instructor.

H. Looks like a torpedo or something in this photograph.

F. I think that's part of an airplane an old shrimp boat pulled up out of the Gulf at Grand Isle.

H. Did you go to Grand Isle when it opened?

F. Ya. Actually, I joined up before they ever went down to the island. When I signed we were based right here on New Orleans Air Base. We used to fly out of there to the

island and then go out into the Gulf and then fly right back here. We did that for several weeks. Then they torpedoed one of the troop ships right out of the mouth of the River. And the following week was when we got the orders to go ahead down and set up base on Grand Isle, and we were an auxilliary to the Army Air Force. We went on down there and set it up. I think I got pictures of the real field.

H. That's your field.

F. That's what I was looking for. See here, Les, that was our administration building. That's the Old Grand Isle Motel. It got pulled down too in a hurricane. This was one runway here. The one right over here was the old gravel shell road which was very, very short. It was the north-south. This here was the parallel strip, east-west. We were constructing this. We had to put this one in because the crosswinds were too damn much down there. Some days, due to the higher winds, you couldn't even go out in them on account of landing and take off, so we built this runway ourselves which was short too.

H. Probably nothing but gravel or shells laid down.

F. That's all, shells. And over here they eventually built themselves a hangar where we could put about three air-planes.

H. Going back a little, Bill, how did the bomb rack end up in your possession?

F. Well, when I was leaving, I just threw it in my car.

H. That's what I say, it ended up in your possession.

F. After we were down there, they had a squadron of P40's out at New Orleans Air Base they used to go out in the Gulf for target practice. And the government sent down a 42 foot aircraft rescue boat, a 65 foot aircraft rescue boat and an amphibian tank all based at Grand Isle. And, for a while, we were living high on the hog down there. I don't know if you ever went out 70, 80, 90 miles in the Gulf in a land airplane. When you sit out there about three hours, it's amazing the peculiarities and the noises that you think you hear. It's not there, but you just think you hear it.

H. I agree, the minute you get out over open water the engine goes ragged. What did you have for lifesaving equipment?

F. What we had, we carried little life jackets, the Mae West as they called them. And, we had inner tubes. Big round inner tubes and we'd inflate them and we had a canvas bottom there laced around the inner tube. In the event that we went down in the Gulf, if we were able we'd crawl

in them things so sharks or anything couldn't get at us. That was our lifesaving equipment. When we went down there we had to scrounge and beg and borrow anything we could get. We couldn't get parts or anything. Course, we lived a different life there on the island than they lived in Pascagoula.

H. Ya, they had built a big barracks and a whole bunch of stuff. What little I've been able to read about what you all had, you just had the hotel and hope the mosquitos didn't carry you off.

F. No way of keeping them out. No way in God's world to keep them out. Our boys didn't have any big Wacos or anything. This is a picture of a Stinson. Man, I tried my damndest to get into the Air Corps. I was 26½ years old. Six months too old, they said no.

H. When did you start working on aircraft, Bill?

F. Oh, I guess about 1938 or 1939 I started out at New Orleans Airport there. Well, Les they had that rating on the aircraft and engine license. Well now it's aircraft and power plant. You had to put in so many hours a year to maintain it. You had a bunch of forms to fill out and send to Washington. In 1945 when I came back here I went to work for National Airlines. Everyday of the week we were working on airplanes. Why should we

fill out a form at the end of the year that's going to take an hour or two hours of our time and send it in. So the company, all the airlines got together and had that discontinued.

H. Well, that was a good idea.

F. Even your private license and all, at one time, you had to fly so many hours a year just to maintain them.

H. We still do.

F. If you feel like you can fly it, you fly it. You got to have your physical though.

H. You worked at National until you retired?

F. Ya.

H. When did you retire, Bill?

F. May the 1st, 1977. I was with them 32 years.

H. That was a good long productive period.

F. Ya, I worked on many different kinds of airplanes.

H. I can imagine. What you started off with, National

DC3's maybe?

F. No, 3's.

H. They didn't use DC3's?

F. I don't think they have any Lodestar pictures in here. There's a DC4. Here's a Lodestar. There's a Fairchild here.

H. You got in CAP when? Just after December of '41?

F. When they organized it. Beginning of it.

H. CAP started December 1 of 1941.

F. When they first organized it, that's when I went in it. Here was my ID Card.

H. Office of Civil Defense, that's an early one. You stayed with it until you went through the Coastal Patrol bit down at Grand Isle. You were down there the whole time? Let's see, July '42 till September '43. About fourteen to fifteen months. They may have stayed down there longer than September, but generally August 31st was the final date.

F. Well, they had some of the personnel stay down there just

closing up. We had some airplanes that had to be worked on to get them out of there, but I didn't stay for that.

H. You came on back, and that's when you went off someplace

F. Well, I went on up to Lafayette.

H. How long did you stay in Lafayette?

F. I stayed six months in Lafayette, and from there went to Decatur, Alabama stayed six or nine months there. They found out there that they didn't need as many pilots as they had thought at the beginning of the war. Because they had a lot of them in cold storage over at Huntsville. They had a base over there and, Christ, they had hundreds of boys over there. And, all of a sudden they put them on airplanes as gunners and all that kind of stuff, navigators.

H. That was a little later though, wasn't it? In '43 they started doing things like that.

F. Well you see, like I say, I went to Decatur from Lafayette and when they shut that base down they found out they didin't need as many pilots as they thought they did. I went on up to New York to ATC-Air Transport Command, and

stayed up there till '45 and came back here about August of '45.

H. And then you went with National?

F. I tell you one thing, Les, with all the flying I did down at Grand Isle, that little short runway I was telling you about, I went down there with my own Stearman one Sunday after the war. I was going to take off going South. Taxied back, turned the airplane around, put the brakes on and revved it up and started down that road. They had to take off and get over the Grand Isle Motel they had then. I looked out the left side, all fine. I looked out the right and there's a sign that said 32 miles to Golden Meadow. (Laughter) I tried to get enough flying speed to pull it up. I said I'm going to raise the wing and get it over the sign. I raised the wing and the tip hooked on the sign and flipped me like that and then threw me off into the swamp.

H. How about while you were flying Coastal Patrol? Do you have any idea of how many hours you flew?

F. No, I didn't log them.

H. You didn't log them?

F. See the way they run that, if you owned an airplane you

picked one of your friends to get as the copilot or observer. So what I said, I was flying out there so I had to wait, maybe one of these guys would get sick or something or not want to fly that day or getting tired or was out the night before and got loaded, you know, I'd go out on flight for them. Course, when you go out on flight the other guy wants to sit back and sleep and you fly the airplane, but I don't know how many hours I flew. Truthfully, I got to where I enjoyed the mechanical end of it, more than the flying end of it. I had no intentions of flying for a living when I came back here.

H. They had more pilots than mechanics, that's for sure.

F. We couldn't get enough twin engine time or four engine time when we came in. The only way you got that in those days was in the Army.

H. It's about that way now, Bill.

F. I just got that thought out of my mind. I said if I want to make a living I would have to get into something that I could get some experience with.

H. Did you have any emergency landings or anything like that?

F. No, not personally, but we lost two airplanes out there, Les. One of them off the mouth of the river, but no casualties. The boys' oil line broke on them, they went down in late afternoon. Couldn't find them till the next morning. Picked them up.

H. Where was the second one?

F. Right in the back of the base, about a mile out. He had come from New Orleans, they had four boys in it. Came in from New Orleans, they went out and circled the field to come back in on the runway and they lost it.

H. They lost it, uh?

F. Don't know whether it iced up on them or what. They went on down into the Gulf.

H. Louisiana had two people who were killed during the CAP service. One was a boy by the name of Jimmy Taylor from Baton Rouge who was killed flying patrol at Beaumont, and the other one was a Freddy Englert who crashed in the Mississippi River on some bombing runs.

F. Freddy was a personal friend of mine. He was flying a major on a mock bombing run. He used to put the troops on the road and come along with those little airplanes

they had flour bags on them, and you'd fly over and throw the flour bags. Whoever got flour on them was dead. In fact, let me show you a picture of Freddy. He was crazy, I guarantee that, but he was a good pilot, though.

H. That's what it takes sometimes for a good pilot.

F. You know when you want to find something you can't. His wife sent the damn picture to me. How do you like that? Here he is right here.

H. He apparently had a child before he died.

F. Oh ya, young Freddy. Freddy, Jr. They're living in Florida now, just north of Pensacola.

H. Bill, tell me a little about the Fleetwing.

F. You know, Les, I'd rather have that airplane right now. You know that was all stainless steel.

H. It was?

F. Yes sir, even the PK screws and nuts and everything were all stainless steel.

H. That must have been an expensive airplane.

F. I lost one of the damn left-hand thread nuts on one of the guy wires, when I was overhauling that one at New Orleans Airport. 5/16 nut. I took it into a machine shop in town. Two and one half bucks to make one nut back in those days.

H. Well, the one ended up at Michoud, who did it belong to?

F. I don't know who owned it, but some people from New York bought it. They came down here and they were inquiring about people who worked on this type airplane and all. Some boys had a little time with it, myself and a guy named Willie Lum, he was down at the base with us. We had worked on the one down there. We found out what he wanted to do to it. Well, then we had to write, see the Fairchild people had bought these people out, and we wrote them for blueprints, and they sent us a set of blueprints for the whole airplane.

H. That guy, Willie Lum, is he still around?

F. Willie retired from National Airlines about a year after I did. He's in Toledo Bend right now. He bought him a little log cabin up there and he's got a bass boat.

H. He's fishing.

F. He's fishing. He and I traveled from 1942 on up. He came down and joined the CAP about the same time I did.

H. He came from where?

F. Helena, Arkansas. Maybe some of them boys are living in Little Rock, cause most of them were from there. I don't know if Ripberger is still living, Mike Heim, Bill Heim.

H. You mean, Bill Heim.

F. I guess so. I know this boy MacDonald here in the picture who was standing by the airplane with me, he was up in age then so I don't think he's living now.

H. Well, you're no chicken.

F. No, Les, I'm 67 right now.

H. You're in good shape.

F. No, not too good. Goddamn diabetes hit me last November and put me in the hospital, never even knew I had it. Had never suffered with it.

H. Just all of a sudden got you.

F. Ya, but I got it under control. If I can keep up like I'm going I'll be in good shape.

H. You'll be like Harry Graham, if you would have known you were going to live this long, you would have taken better care of yourself.

F. Ya, I'd like to see old Harry again. Les, put this with your pictures, there ain't too many now.

H. I got plenty of copies of this. I copied that.

F. I don't have a big copy. Any of these you want to take?

H. If I can borrow your book, I'm going to copy them all.

F. Take it.

H. I'll get it back to you in a week or so.

F. Ain't no hurry.

H. And can I take this with me to copy too? I've got a copy stand, what I do is just shoot pictures of it. What the overall program is I'll probably copy all of them.

F. If I find anything else

H. I'd appreciate it.

F. I'll give you a call.

H. I'd appreciate it.

F. I may stumble on something.

H. And if you ever think of somebody else around, that would really be a help.

F. Well, if I can dig up anything else for you, I sure as hell will.

H. Well, what we're trying to do is, based on our conversation, I'll write up a little summary and put in in my files and then we'll do a transcript. After you look at it, and if you agree, we'll put in at the Civil Air Patrol Headquarters at Maxwell Air Force Base where we're trying to build a historical file on CAP.

F. Oh, if I could only find somebody with one of those books, goddamn it.

H. Do you remember the name of it?

F. No, this boy, one of the boys in Little Rock had it.

H. Just about Base 9, huh? (Subsequently located as "Joe-Submarine Hunter")

F. Just about Grand Isle, that's right.

H. I don't even know where to begin to look for it. Just about 50 pages or so?

F. That's about right. Now how many of them he made, I don't know. He may have made just enough to give each member of the base one, Les.

H. That's the kind of stuff you like to capture. We've done pretty good actually, CAP, like the card says, was part of Civil Defense. Then in about '42 it moved to the War Department under control of the Army Air Corps.

F. You see, when the Civil Defense had it, we had to go three nights a week up to the Court Building on Royal Street to go through first aid class. It was more than a First aid course. They taught you everything.

H. Well, the training program in CAP back in those days was pretty extensive.

F. Hell, I could set a leg in an emergency. Check all the blood pressures where to stop the blood so you wouldn't

bleed to death.

H. Good stuff to know.

F. Then they gave you an examination. There was no sitting there shaking your head, you had to get and give a practical on somebody.

H. Ya, Civil Defense back then was pretty restrictive. But, we were able to get a lot of the early Civil Defense documents and we got a lot of the written information instructions, rules and stuff like that from the early, well, just about through the '40's. And then about 1951 CAP died. And then it started coming back about the late '50's. So we got about a six or seven year period in there that we don't have any of the rules or any of the documents or anything else that we've been doing quite a bit of research on. It's a bunch of people like myself. I've always been an avid military historian.

F. Well, I enjoyed it while I was there. Even at New Orleans Airport we had an instructor out there, an old master sergeant in the Army. Every weekend you walked from that New Orleans Airport to Paris Road and back. That was your hike.

H. Couldn't fly planes if you didn't know how to walk.

F. That's a good way to put it. They were going to keep you fit.

H. I tell you Bill, I really appreciate your time.

F. I don't know what else to tell you, Les.

H. Well, you know that's sort of what it is, an individual's reminiscence and learning what you can about it. I think I have a pretty good idea, what little research I've done up to now, you've pretty well confirmed it. It wasn't a fancy place like Pascagoula was.

F. Oh no, it wasn't nothing fancy.

H. Not like Pascagoula was, it was strictly make do.

F. You got out and made whatever you needed, and that was it.

H. Now you all just sort of took over the Oleander.

F. Ya.

H. Now there was another hotel there, you called it the Grand Isle. (Subsequently identified as the Brown Hotel).

F. Well, the Grand Isle wasn't a hotel at that time. It was a hotel, but they had closed it down. So being at the position that we could use the road as the runway we used that as an administration building.

H. But you stayed in the Oleander.

F. Then, after awhile, three or four of us got together and rented these camps down there. It was better than staying in one room. The Oleander was just little bitty rooms with a bed and a dresser in it.

H. Ya, I remember.

F. When we first went down there we didn't even have warm or hot water showers. We used to take a shower outside like you did in the summertime. And did you ever try taking a shower in December out in the open.

H. I've taken a shower in Korea in 40 degree below weather, but I tell you what, I didn't take many of them. I stayed kind of dirty most of the time.

F. You know the saying, you can take a bath in a thimble, well, that's what we did lots of times. We would have caught pneumonia out there.

H. In Korea they had bath companies. They went out in the

wilderness and set up four or five tents and they would get hot, hot water. It would literally be 30 or 40 degrees below zero outside and you were all right, you were nice and warm as long as you were in that shower tent, but when you had to go back and get dressed. So it got to the point that you just didn't take them.

F. How did they get the water so hot?

H. Steam generators. It was regular unit.

F. We eventually put in hot water showers and all that inside the hotel. This boy, Freddy Englert, his son was about 13 or 14 years old, came down on the week-end with him. They had the damn showers and the man hadn't put the damn men and women on the doors yet. So Saturday afternoon all these gals were taking a shower in there. Young Freddy comes in and says Dad where can I take a shower. He said go down to the second door, not the first door, the first door is for the women. Goddamn, about two minutes later we heard the damndest screams, he had sent his son to the women's restroom. We said Freddy you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

H. Give the kid a thrill.

F. Little Freddy came back red, blue, white, all colors. (laughter)

H. Did you have females working down there at the time?

F. Ya, they had four or five of them doing clerical work down there. They had a secretary, but don't ask me their names I have a bad memory.

H. They wore uniforms and the whole thing too, huh? They wore skirts or pants?

F. They wore skirts.

H. There's a little bit of a bugaboo about what females wore during the time, and what few pictures I've been able to round up of them it looks like skirts to me but there was quite a bit of discussion about skirts or culottes.

F. I don't know what the squadrons are doing here in New Orleans. Don't they have a squadron out there at Lakefront?

H. Well, there is a Wing Headquarters and about four or five squadrons and they're doing their thing. The squadron we have on the Westbank is a little bit different, we're over there by ourselves.

F. Well, the airport over there you land on the strip parallel and the canal.

H. We don't keep our airplane over there. We're lucky, I'm ex military, so I have a lot of friends and we keep our airplane out at Naval Air Station.

F. Well, you're all right then.

H. Oh, we're first class.

F. I flew in that field with a friend of mine.

H. You mean Westwego?

F. Came in over the wire and they skidded and I said Jesus Christ we're going into the canal.

H. They've got the canal, grass strip and then a black top strip parallel, and I always put my bird on the grass.

F. They had that strip along the canal. Just a short one.

H. But I always land on the grass between the canal and the strip. I'm always flying that old bird dog. It's better on grass than it is on hard surfaces. Just like all tail draggers, it has an independent mind to try to

go whichever way it wants. Okay, Bill, we'll get out of your hair. Again, I sure appreciate it. I'll take good care of these things, and we'll return them.

F. Okay, if I find anything

H. If you find anything, I'd appreciate it. That's interesting about your acquisition of the bomb rack.

F. I used to have the rest of it, show you the hookup on it. We cut the fabric away on several of the airplanes after we had about thirty or forty. Every damn tube on it had hairline cracks. They were getting ready to go. Had to pull all them damned things out, tore the airplanes apart, sleeved them and put them back on. Gussets to strengthen them.

H. Ya, they weren't enough to hold a bomb.

F. Airplanes didn't have the quick disconnects on the door and we took all the hinge pins out welded the cable on them, bottom and top, put a pulley on the top then you pulled the cable and there your door went.

H. You all didn't carry chutes or anything like that,

did you?

F. Didn't know what chutes were.

H. Chutes were mostly for the military back then and very few civilians had them.

F. The only thing we had there were the Mae West and the inner tubes.

H. Talking about inner tubes, there seemed to have been a trick at the time to stuff the rear end of the airplane with them not fully inflated, just kind of partially inflated to give a little more buoyancy in case they went down, is that right?

F. Yes, the Army ships going overseas had the wings full of ping pong balls.

H. Is that what they did?

F. Try to use as a flotation device, to keep them things up awhile. You flying across the ocean. You go down there, lots of times your life span is about three minutes whether your airplane floats or not.

H. Maybe they figured they needed to know where to throw the wreath out. Again, Bill, thanks for your help.